

Minutes of a meeting of the Monks Wall Nature Reserve Management Committee, 12th October 2015, in the Mayor's Parlour, Guildhall, Sandwich at 7:00pm

Present: The Deputy Mayor, Cllr Mrs J Dunay (in the Chair)
Cllr RA Daw
Cllr JE Franklin
Dr M Griffiths
Dr A Lipczynski
Dr M Walkey

Officer: Ms T Weir

01.10.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Watts, due to ill health. No apologies were received from Mr Gibbs.

02.10.15 DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT INTERESTS

Dr Griffiths declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda items 9 (minuted as 09.10.15, *Confidential Item*) and 10 (minuted as 10.10.15, *Budget*). No other interests were declared.

03.10.15 MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the Management Committee meeting on 20th July 2015. There were no matters arising.

04.10.15 PROGRESS REPORT

The Warden, Dr Griffiths, provided a report to the Committee, a copy of which is attached to these minutes (appendix I). He gave apologies that he had not been present at the previous Committee meeting.

Cllr Daw asked why the old pump mentioned in Dr Griffiths' report was now useless and inaccessible. Dr Griffiths replied that while access to that area had been restricted by the activity of the Environment Agency, there had been no opportunity to fix or maintain the pump. It was now surrounded by a bund and overgrown by vegetation, making it hard to access. Its owner, Mr Kingsland, did not want the pump back and did not expect it to function again. Dr Lipczynski asked whether the condition of the pump was in the snagging list for the Environment Agency, Dr Griffiths stated it was not.

05.10.15 FINANCE

The Committee received and noted the Monks Wall Nature Reserve accounts as at 30th September 2015. Dr Lipczynski requested that the line *Environment Agency – grant* be amended to *Environment Agency – compensation*, for clarity.

06.10.15 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY TIDAL DEFENCE WORKS

The Committee received and considered an email dated 10th September 2015 from Julian Sampson (GW Finn & Sons) to Richard Saville (Environment

Agency) and relevant photos regarding the condition of the Reserve following the Tidal Defence Works on site. Mr Sampson had annotated his email (text in capitals) on 6th October 2015 to indicate where further updates were available.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(i) That Julian Sampson (GW Finn & Sons) be thanked for his work on the snagging list linked to the Environment Agency's work on and departure from the Reserve site.

(ii) That the Town Council should support Mr Sampson's attempts to ensure all bare areas remaining on the Reserve are satisfactorily re-seeded to promote beneficial growth rather than thistles and scrub.

(iii) That if satisfactory re-seeding and growth has not taken place by the start of the next grazing season, a claim for compensation should be made to the Environment Agency for likely loss of grazing revenue.

07.10.15 RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Committee received and considered a draft Interim Management Plan, prepared by Dr Walkey in consultation with Mr Gibbs, Dr Griffiths and Dr Lipczynski. Dr Walkey informed the Committee that the draft Interim Management Plan differed from the previous Plan in structure as it was based on Natural England's template plan for reserves. All recommendations made in the draft Plan were tentative at the time of writing, pending stabilisation of the Reserve site following the departure of the Environment Agency's contractors. In response to a query by Cllr Daw, Dr Walkey stated that the £6,500 expenditure outlined did not include drainage rates or extraction fees.

RECOMMENDATION:

(i) That the draft Interim Management Plan be accepted and used to monitor the situation on the Reserve, with a review of the Plan scheduled for October 2016.

08.10.15 WATER TRANSFER LICENCE

The Committee considered whether to apply for a new water transfer abstraction licence from the Environment Agency on the same terms as the current licence SO/040/0009/001. Dr Griffiths said that water transfer levels depended on conditions and that now water would come onto the Reserve site through an input sluice (if open) at a speed dependent on weather and the tide. Ms Weir stated that nil returns had been made recently as no water had been taken out while the Environment Agency's contractors were on site. Dr Griffiths added that he had taken water from the river recently, since the departure of the Agency's contractors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(i) That an application for a new licence be made on the same terms as the previous licence, with an application fee of £135.

(ii) That Mark Chandler (GW Finn & Sons) be asked to complete the necessary forms at the suggested fee of £130 excl. VAT.

Dr Griffiths left the meeting at this point.

09.10.15 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

(i) It was RESOLVED that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (as extended by s.100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

(ii) The Committee considered a report by Miss Laura Fidler, Town Clerk, regarding the changing role of the Reserve Warden.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(i) That a two-year agreement, at a cost of £1400 (excl. VAT) per annum (with additional charges at £100 per hour excl. VAT for unique projects) would be suitable; however, the Town Clerk is asked to amend the responsibilities requested of GW Finn & Sons to exclude liaison with external funding bodies (not required as the Reserve is no longer funded externally e.g. by the Rural Payments Agency) and to include determining the need for injurious plant control and formalising any proposals for control including, if applicable, a proposed Spraying Plan. Notwithstanding the budget approval given above, the Town Clerk is asked to enquire whether a reduction in cost would be available given these changes.

(ii) That in all other respects, the new division of responsibilities as proposed in the Town Clerk's report is acceptable. The recommended division of responsibilities is attached to these minutes (appendix II).

(iii) That to reflect the diminution of responsibilities attributable to the Warden's role, that role should attract an honorarium of £1500 p.a.

(iv) That since the role of the Warden is to change a great deal, the position should be reopened. The current Warden is welcome to reapply for the role should he so wish alongside other applicants. Should no suitable candidate be identified the Reserve may have to close to the public pending appointment of a Warden as per the changed role.

(v) That the health & safety aspects of the revised Warden's role be particularly highlighted to candidates as being of importance, and that in order to ensure these requirements are clear, the Council's Health & Safety contractor should inspect the Reserve to set down the necessary requirements and guidelines as a matter of urgency.

(vi) That the Warden's role and performance be reviewed on a six-monthly basis.

10.10.15

BUDGET

The Committee considered, in the light of the recommendation(s) reached regarding items 07.10.15, 08.10.15 and 09.10.15 above, likely expenditure requirements and income streams relating to the Reserve in order to offer recommendations for incorporation in next year's Reserve budget. Committee members noted that potential income of a currently unconfirmed amount could come following compensation negotiations with the Environment Agency, as well as grazing.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (i) That £3,000 be set aside for personnel in 2016/17 (GW Finn & Sons and a Warden).

(ii) That as per minute 08.10.15 above, £280 be included in calculations for the current year to cover application for a new water transfer abstraction licence from the Environment Agency on the same terms as the current licence SO/040/0009/001 and completion of required paperwork by Mark Chandler (GW Finn & Sons).

(iii) That, while the condition of the Reserve is stabilising and negotiations are continuing with the Environment Agency regarding snagging and possible compensation, the Budget should be a recurring item on Committee agendas.

Dr Griffiths returned to the meeting.

11.10.15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 18th January 2016, at 7pm, in the Council Chamber, Guildhall.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

MONK'S WALL NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
REPORT for up to 15 September 2015.

1. **Management Progress:-** The Reserve has recently been under the control of teams of contractors from the Environment Agency's flood-risk management scheme for the 'Monk's Wall' and the 'riverbank'. This has involved considerable addition and movement of soil which is now complete. Operation of our main outlet sluice has been adjusted which we hope will improve its use.
2. **The first small field** has been considerably disturbed by contractors' heavy machinery, despite their use of plastic sheeting. **Brand new fencing** has been provided by the Environment Agency.
3. **Vegetation has grown** considerably to a metre in height; hiding the view of birds and other wildlife. **Cattle** are now grazing.
4. **Access by your Warden:** I had free access to our bird hide, assuming use of **helmet and reflective visible yellow jacket**. I also needed to be aware of heavy machinery on the move most of the time. **No access** was allowed elsewhere except to remove our **old fuel bowser**. This was achieved earlier with the help of **Martin Shepherd**. The bowser was eventually sold by Sandwich Town Council for £300. The **old pump to the river** is now useless and inaccessible.
5. **Birds seen on the reserve** from the hide were few. Earlier in the winter there were **Teal, larger gulls, occasional Peregrine Falcon, Buzzard** and frequent **Kestrels**. Recent observations include regular **Reed and Sedge Warbler, Blue Tit; Robin, Dunnock, Blackbird** and regular **Carrion Crow and Magpies**. **Up to a thousand Wood Pigeons** were regular on the cultivated fields alongside our access track while earlier in the season up to **4 Whinchats** were seen on the perimeter fence. **Cettis Warbler** was regularly heard.
6. **Up to 8 Song thrushes** and several **Linnets** were seen feeding in the fields flying from the nearest hedgerow or wire fence. **Meadow Pipits** were regular.
7. **Recently; through the good offices of Julian Sampson**, we persuaded the Environment Agency to consider cutting the vegetation down in the main field from in front of the hide, to allow some better views from the hide.

Martin Griffiths. Reserve Warden.

**MONKS WALL NATURE RESERVE
DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES: GW FINN & SONS / WARDEN
As recommended by the Management Committee, 12-10-2015**

G.W. Finn & Sons:

- Give an overview of Reserve management in accordance with the current version of the Management Plan.
- Report to the Management Committee before taking any action which deviates from the Management Plan.
- Report to the Management Committee on any difficulties with any Committee-approved activities so that all are aware of the situation.
- Together with the Town Clerk identify potential Graziers, negotiate the contract with the selected person/organisation.
- Determine the need for unwanted injurious plant control, formalise any proposals for control including, if applicable, a proposed Spraying Plan.
- Liaise with authorities requiring access to the Reserve.
- Liaise with contractors, except those appointed by the statutory authorities, ensure they have suitable method statements and risk assessments.
- Recommend to the Committee when situations indicate a need to close the Reserve to the public.
- Attend the Reserve for four site meetings per year to check the site and report back to the Management Committee on any matters arising.
- Attend Management Committee meetings from time to time, as necessary.

Warden:

- Regularly monitor/record the wildlife on the Reserve.
- Manage the water level on the Reserve.
- Submit monthly written reports to the Town Council on water levels and salinity.
- Submit written reports to each meeting of the Monks Wall Nature Reserve Management Committee.
- Upkeep of hides, access paths and points of interest.
- Walk the Reserve to ensure all public access ways are such as not to constitute a risk to any person's safety. Check that all signage and safety equipment is in place. The guidelines for the above will be set out by the Council's Health & Safety advisors.
- To report immediately to the Management Committee on any adverse or potentially adverse situation which has or could occur, particularly if it could impact the public (for example, a damaged hide or fence).
- Supervise and act as a guide for school, and other parties, visiting the Reserve, for example for pond dipping.
- Check that members of the public on the Reserve have the necessary Permit from the Sandwich Town Council Offices.
- Recommend to the Committee when situations indicate a need to close the Reserve to the public.